

In the early spring of 1965, I was listening one night to Jerry White's folk show on WJRZ when he said, "We have a new single from Bob Dylan." White sounded kind of hesitant, the tone of his voice implied that we were about to hear something very different. That single was "Subterranean Homesick Blues." I didn't know what to think. I liked it and hated it all at once. I didn't know whether he was selling out as Sing Out! and other folk magazines were soon to proclaim. Naturally I bought it as soon as it hit the local record store, and ended up playing it as well as the flipside, "She Belongs To Me" endlessly. About a month later, I was at an anti-Vietnam demonstration in Newark, New Jersey and snuck off the picket line into a record store across the street. There it was: Bringing It All Back Home in all its red-white-and-blue glory. I just stood there in the store holding it and staring at it for a good while. That night, it didn't leave the turntable. I must've played "Mr. Tambourine Man" 20 times in a row.

I was a few months shy of being 14 and quickly realized this was the album I'd been waiting for my entire life, and nothing would be the same again. It was funny and powerful, but still poetic, maybe more poetic than ever and absolutely brilliant. And I had no doubt that he was speaking right to me. I remember stopping after laughing hysterically at the beginning of "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream," where he cracks up, and putting the needle back to the beginning of the song. I couldn't believe it! Soon I was playing "Maggie's Farm" in the morning right before I left for school, and again the minute I got home. I'd pretty much given up on school at that point, and my parents decided to send me to a shrink. For weeks, I tried to explain things to him and felt I was getting nowhere. Finally one day I borrowed a portable record player from a friend, brought it to the session, and saying, "It's like this," played him "It's Alright Ma." I stopped seeing him shortly after that.

Even though "Subterranean Homesick Blues" wasn't a huge hit, Dylan's move to rock and roll was starting to change music. The Byrds hit with "Tambourine Man" and Dylan songs and imitation Dylan songs were getting recorded like mad. Everyone was jumping on the bandwagon. Bob was in the teen magazines here and music magazines in Europe where he was on tour. Columbia promoted this album like no Dylan album before it. There were cool little stand-up Dylan's wearing his suit and shades, holding an electric guitar and at the bottom it said, "Bob Dylan brings it all back home on Columbia Records," and there were other ones that said "No one sings Dylan like Dylan." I went out and bought a white shirt with a snap-tab collar, black shades and boots, and naturally started wearing them to school. The authorities weren't the least bit happy about this.

Soon it was summer and I was going to camp -- luckily a camp where Dylan was already pretty much of a hero. It was about mid-July when my brother came up to me and said, "I heard a new Dylan single on the radio and it has an organ on it!" I went crazy the next few days trying to find enough free time to listen to the radio long enough to hear it. The guys in my cabin used this to play all kinds of practical jokes on me. Finally one of the counselors went to New York on their day off and came back with a copy, and soon "Like A Rolling Stone" was on the radio all the time. Word of what went down at Newport that summer might have filtered into the camp, but what did filter in

was Dylan was going to be at Forest Hills Tennis Stadium the very day camp ended.

It was off the bus from camp and on the subway to Queens. Right before the show, I ran into my brother who I didn't even know was coming. He'd just been arrested for littering--he was actually handing out anti-Vietnam literature. We could hear Dylan and his band doing their soundcheck. It was a cold and windy night for August and the atmosphere wasn't at all like the two previous Dylan shows I'd attended. Jerry White served as MC and brought out disc-jockey, Murray the K who said, "It's not rock, it's not folk, it's a new thing called Dylan") and was soundly booed. Finally, Dylan appeared alone, wearing a suit very much like the one on the cover of *Bringing It All Back Home* and started with "She Belongs To Me." In the middle of the song he walked to the side of the stage and started posing for photographers. This was a very different Dylan show. There were no "protest songs" and only time Dylan talked was to introduce "Desolation Row," which had the crowd cracking up on virtually every line. With the stage way out in the middle of the field, the intimacy of the Philharmonic Hall show less than a year before was gone. Dylan ended his set with "Tambourine Man."

After the intermission Jerry White appeared again and introduced another rock d.j. Gary Stevens of WMCA who also was booed. While the booing was going on, Dylan emerged with a four-piece band, ripped into "Tombstone Blues" and pandemonium broke loose. People were shouting and booing and cheering. The audience settled down to listen to the next song, the now-rocked-up "I Don't Believe You." At the conclusion, a new chant started "We want Dylan, we want Dylan." But he kept on playing, previewing the songs from *Highway 61 Revisited*. The booing and shouting continued, but during the songs the audience listened. Then all of a sudden during one of the songs, a bunch of young boys jumped on-stage followed by cops and security guards, chasing them around the stage. Dylan and his band kept right on playing. The next song, it happened again. Total craziness. Dylan went to the piano and played "Ballad of a Thin Man," the "something is happening, but you don't know what it is" line the perfect comment for the night. Finally, he did "Like A Rolling Stone" to more cheers and boos. The audience left divided in the chilly August night. Summer was over.

A few days later, back in my hometown, I was walking down the street with my brother when I saw what looked like a new Dylan album in the window of the record store across the street. Sure enough, there was *Highway 61 Revisited*.

If *Bringing It All Back Home* not so gently bridged the gap between Bob Dylan the folksinger and Bob Dylan the rock 'n' roller with its half and half acoustic/electric format, *Highway 61* was a full-force attack -- the music relentlessly harder with Mike Bloomfield's lightning runs punctuating Dylan's lyrics and Al Kooper's organ providing a perfect carnival atmosphere.

There was no doubt that Dylan's new songs demanded the accompaniment. The songs on *Highway 61* stepped over the line into an upside down world of the absurd where emotion ruled over sense, the dominant emotion being confusion. *Highway 61* is notable for its cast of characters, drawn from

history, literature, theater, song, legend and myth. These characters were placed in a world where all notions of time and place collapse into a twilight dream zone of funhouse mirrors where anything can happen and impossible situations are the norm. Kings and Queens are out on the street with paupers, gamblers, freaks and con-men, all of them equal, all of them either tormented or tormenting, and all of them pulling some kind of scam.

If the songs on Highway 61 Revisited didn't make sense in a logical, linear way -- and indeed their meaning is still being discussed and argued about more than 30 years later -- they certainly made sense emotionally. You didn't have to understand them, you only had to feel them."

I barely had a chance to absorb the songs on Highway 61 when a new single "Positively Fourth Street" was released and quickly rose to the top of the charts. Unlike the songs on the album, "4th Street" a put-down song, probably directed at his old friends from the folk community, many of whom were rushing to condemn his move to rock, was easy to understand. The controversy Dylan had created with his Newport Folk Festival appearance earlier that summer raged in the fall issue of Sing Out! Magazine with several accounts of his performance, both pro and con.

A couple of weeks after "4th Street" was released, a friend called one night: "Listen, the guy on the radio announced 'Positively Fourth Street,' but it's not. It's some weird song about crawling out a window." He put the phone next to the radio and I could hear it. It certainly wasn't "4th Street." A few months later a new Dylan single, "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window?" was released. I bought it immediately, but when I played it I knew this wasn't what I heard on the phone earlier that fall. This was a mystery that wouldn't be revealed until years later.

A couple of weeks later Dylan came to the Mosque in Newark again, except this time it was renamed Symphony Hall. On the day of the show, I rode the bus to Newark and bought a ticket for three or four bucks. The ticket said "Stage site" and back then it was common to sit people on the stage at sell-out shows. It was still early in the day and Newark wasn't any place to hang out for seven hours so I took the bus back home. As I took my seat I noticed a Cadillac limo going by the bus towards the theater. There was a head with a lot of hair in the back window. I'm still wondering and still kicking myself for not getting off the bus.

That night, by myself, I rode the bus back to Newark. When I got to the theater, there were kids from my school there. This was a first. No one in my school liked Dylan, but he had hit singles now. When I went to my seat, I found it wasn't on the stage though people were sitting there. My seat was where the orchestra pit should have been. They put out about four rows of folding chairs in front of the regular seats and mine was in the first row, second seat from the center! I couldn't believe my luck, but I didn't know if the show would be a replay of the craziness of Forest Hills or not. There were cops standing at each side of the stage.

Dylan came out wearing a grey suit and started again with "She Belongs To Me." The expression of his face looked just like the cover of Times They Are

A-Changin', but his hair was wild and long. During "Gates of Eden," he coughed a couple of times and a guard brought him a glass of water. He took a gulp and turned back to the microphone, "Excuse me, but I just got over a case of leprosy." The acoustic set was the same as Forest Hills. The audience was quiet and respectful.

After intermission he returned with what I later found out was the Hawks. They were all wearing suits and had real short hair and looked really straight next to Dylan. There was a row of huge Fender amps lined up behind them on the stage. Again they started with "Tombstone Blues," and proceeded to make the loudest, craziest noise I'd ever heard. Looking back, it was probably the first time I saw a rock 'n' roll band in concert, other than bands at my high school. If Dylan was somewhat sedate during the acoustic set, he was alive now, bouncing around on his high-heeled suede boots, turning furiously after each verse to Robbie Robertson who was unleashing guitar runs like I'd never heard, while the organist (who looked a little like Jonathan Winters) and the piano player were just going crazy. There was no booing! The next song really got me: "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," from Dylan's first album. I couldn't believe it! Then with his guitar still on, Dylan lowered his harmonica holder, and brought a harp to his lips. "This is called 'I Don't Believe You,' it used to be like that, but now it goes like this." And then, a slow very different "It Ain't Me Babe" and on through "Maggie's Farm" "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," "Thin Man" and "Rolling Stone." This time, there was an encore, "Positively 4th St."

A kid from school offered me a ride home. In the car, his father who was at the concert said, "I don't see what all the fuss is about." I didn't know it then -- and if anyone had told me, I would've been devastated -- but it would be almost nine years before I would see Dylan in concert again.